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THE
BELFAST MONTHLY MAGAZINE.

No. 22.]

MAY 31, 1810.

[Vol. 4.

COMMUNICATIONS, ORIGINAL AND SELECTED.

For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.

ON THE WRITINGS COMMONLY DISSEMINATED AMONG THE POPULACE, AND THE MOST ELIGIBLE MEANS OF COUNTERACTING THEIR INFLUENCE.

THE ignorance and misery of a large portion of the people of Ireland, have stimulated patriotism to make great exertions for the melioration of their condition; and in the middle ranks their exertions have not been entirely fruitless. But that class which an aristocrat would denominate the *swinish multitude*, or the dregs of the people, has been deemed too inconsiderable to deserve much attention. When the wise man deigned to admonish them, it was in language so much above their comprehension, that he seemed rather desirous of displaying his own understanding, than of enlightening their's; and the great man has been rigorous in punishing the disorders, that by sedulous care he could have prevented. Content to see the principal workmen safe, they were too proud to warn the abandoned underlings to escape from the tottering edifice.

The stupid, sensual scribbler, however, by lowering his lucubrations to their rude capacity, or rather by not being able to elevate his lucubrations above them, has been as successful as he was industrious in corrupting them. In every market and fair of our country villages, some itinerant musician bellows out a panegyric on debauchery, riot, and splendid ruin; and sells the destructive doggerel as fast as he can hand it out. The gaping bumpkins shrug, and laughs, and having waited to learn the tune, hums it along the path, which the Grub-street muse, for want of flowers, has strewed with weeds; the perilous path, that leads him to some of the

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"styes which law has licensed;" where, obedient to his anonymous monitor, he inhales as many potations as his whole pig's price will purchase, swears his hostess out of half a pint, and wrecks some churl's windows, as, "gloriously drunk," he rages home. If his wife or mother presume next morning, to lecture a little on industry, sobriety, and such antiquated topics, he pulls out the cheap apology for licentiousness, which they must know is now become fashionable, and half spells, half sings her to silence, or kicks her out of doors, if he can find a verse that will authorize him so to do. When, "changing these notes to tragic," the beldame chants the notable achievements of some admirable youth, who commenced his career with swindling, proceeded to felony, was found guilty of burglary and murder, disdained the benefit of clergy, and died hard on the gallows; what can be expected, but that the bullies will attack the dastards, to imitate his prowess; and the sharpers pick the simpletons' pockets, ere they leave the crowd, to equal his dexterity? Every untuneable voice calls on the sweet singer, for "Larry's last farewell;" every child is caressed, who can lisp a line or two of it; and the baleful ballad decoys over more proselytes to profligacy in one week, than the parson of the parish has reclaimed from it in his whole life.

The striplings whose ears are barred against the energetic notes of an "excellent new song," the blessed biographic sketch of 24 pages does not find so unsusceptible; and their father, though he would willingly teach them their duty if he knew it, inadvertently encourages them to imbibe pernicious principles. As soon as the hawker's basket is set down,

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if he have as much money as will purchase whatever worthless work they happen to fancy, it is cheerfully granted, happy in the hope, that while they seek amusement only, they will be ensnared into the art of reading. The means are blameable, as the end is praise worthy. Some knowledge of the rudiments of education they do thus acquire; but, at the same time they become acquainted with the deep arts of villainy, which they would have been a thousand times happier never to have been able to read, than to have learned. It is not improbable, that owing to the imperceptible power of first impressions, *Robin Hood* has given many a boy's mind a disorderly cast, that all his future improvements were not able wholly to eradicate: that *Captain James Hand*, the chief robber of England, has caused the mail-coach to be frequently plundered in the present times, and that *Redmond O' Hanlon*, the ring-leader of the Irish rogues, has got numbers of his countrymen marked as criminals on the red calendar, who, but for him would, as good men and true, have been sworn jurors, at the ensuing assizes.

But what antidote, that has not already been applied, would I oppose to the embosomed poison?—Have not religious missionaries traversed our uncivilized counties? Have not pastoral addresses been circulated by bishops and synods? And have not the scriptures of truth been gratuitously disseminated? They have, indeed; but unfortunately many who suffer under the most inveterate moral maladies, are below the reach of such prescriptions; and the rest like children who nauseate the bitter cup, call for correctives more agreeable to their taste.

The populace must be reclaimed by means rude and simple as those that perverted them, and to render such means efficacious, the reformer must begin by shaming to silence the incendiary who would inflame their follies: let then the Printer, nobly disdaining every paltry emolument, gained at the expense of virtue, decency, and even common sense, indignantly spurn the Poetaster

who presents him his pernicious rhapsody, and immediately suppress it: and let him publish with as little profit as he can, the encomium of the grateful sailor, who magnanimously remitted his pay and prize-money to the far-fallen benefactor that released him from all the evils of orphanage; or who, like the compassionate *Rushmore*, hazarded his health, and lost it, by attending the sick, suffering captives, when they had no other earthly friend. Let the elegy of the hero who perished attempting to rescue shipwrecked foreigners from the waves, or in opposing the banditti, who were bearing off his neighbour's property, be purchased by such as even despise the rudeness of the composition, and distributed among the boys in the neighbourhood, as rewards of minor merit: and let the country school master, whose judgment every child holds infallible, recommend the halfpenny-worth of amusing morality whenever he sees the sympathetic circle gather round it; and applaud or censure his pupils, as they emulate its characters, or act unlike them.

If a society of genuine philanthropists would establish a "cheap repository" in this country, like the one in London, the voluntary contributions of the opulent and liberal-minded, would certainly enable them to dispose of numberless valuable little tracts, at an extremely moderate price; and they would as certainly find writers well disposed enough to compose for them without expecting to profit by their labours. Such stories as "Sam the obliging errand boy" "Billy the honest gold-finder," and "Pat the merciful carman," written in an easy, intelligible, and entertaining manner, by interesting the imagination would powerfully impress the heart; and though they might fail to reform many of the vicious habits of the confirmed prodigate, they would prevent thousands of their juvenile readers from contracting them, as the flame that cannot be suppressed, by proper management, may be kept from communicating itself to the adjacent buildings.

Bullycarry.

CENSOR.